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Illegal Israeli actions in Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Security Council
Sixty-third year

Identical letters dated 29 September 2008 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

I write to you today to draw your attention to a critical matter directly related to the recent debate convened on Friday, 26 September 2008, by the Security Council on Israel's illegal settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. While Israelis confiscation of Palestinian land, demolition of Palestinian homes and imposition of movement and residency restrictions continue for the purpose of furthering the ongoing and intensifying campaign of settlement construction and expansion, in grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention, the Palestinian civilian population also continues to suffer from violence and terror at the hands of armed and fanatical Israeli settlers.

Acts of Israeli settler harassment, violence, intimidation, destruction and terrorism have sharply increased in the past few months resulting in the death and injury of innocent Palestinian civilians and the destruction of Palestinian properties. Such criminal actions are being perpetrated with impunity as the settlers illegally transferred by the occupying Power to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, enjoy full immunity from the law, and there is rarely any effort exerted to hold them accountable for their transgressions against the Palestinian civilian population.

The most recent of such crimes was committed on Saturday, 27 September, when a group of armed Israeli settlers attacked several Palestinian shepherds tending to their flocks in an area of south of Nablus, near the illegal Israeli settlement of "Itamar". The settlers killed a young Palestinian, Yehya Bani Meniya, whose bullet-ridden body was only recovered by his family after a many hour search near the "Itamar" settlement.

This heinous act took place just shortly after President Mahmoud Abbas addressed the Security Council providing a detailed account of the threat of Israel's relentless, unlawful settlement campaign to any prospects for realizing the peace and stability and warning of the dangers posed to the lives and welfare of innocent

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Palestinians by violent settlers. In this regard, the illegal settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, are a breeding ground for racist violence against Palestinians, undoubtedly encouraged by a systematic leniency by Israel, the occupying Power, towards the settler population, many of whom are determined to drive out Palestinians from their homes through intimidation and terror.

This act was preceded by several others, including on 13 September 2008 when a mob of armed settlers from the illegal Israeli settlement "Yitzhar" attacked Asira Al-Qiblia village, south of Nablus. Footage released by the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem shows Israeli forces watching as the mob ransacked the village, spray-painted the "star of David" on homes, fired live rounds indiscriminately into village homes and injured several residents, including a 7-year-old boy who was gravely wounded. This attack was publicly praised by the settlement's rabbi, who called it the "right" and "healthy thing to do" and, despite official Israeli condemnation, no one was arrested following the attack, fuelling the climate of impunity.

Shortly after the settlers raided and terrorized the village, another group of settlers from the same settlement set fire to at least 50 dunums of Palestinian-owned olive trees in Burin the village, south of Nablus. The land that was burned was off limits to its Palestinian owners, who are forced to obtain special permit from the occupying Power in order to access their own land and who were unable to save their trees and could only watch from afar as their harvest was engulfed by flames.

These recent attacks are a prelude to what awaits Palestinian farmers as the olive harvest season nears, a crucially important time of the year for Palestinian farmers and the struggling local economy. In the past, settlers have carried out repeated attacks against Palestinian farmers and harvesters, causing harm to them, to their crops and to their livelihoods and exacerbating the already punitive measures imposed by the occupying Power, including more than 600 checkpoints and obstructions to the freedom of movement and the continuing unlawful construction of the wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, that have impacted the Palestinian economy and social fabric so detrimentally.

Moreover, these violent and terrorist attacks are only few of the many examples of what the defenceless Palestinian civilian population faces at the hands of Israeli settlers. The settlements and their inhabitants continue to encroach on the lives, livelihoods, security and well-being of the Palestinian people and constitute a real and present danger to the future prospects for peace. At this critical time, it is urgent that the international community call for an immediate cessation of any such attacks against civilians. A central part of this effort begins with ensuring that illegal settlement activities, including so-called "natural growth", are completely halted. Israel, the occupying Power, must not be allowed to continue such destructive colonization policies in breach of international humanitarian law, United Nations resolutions and its obligation under the Quartet's road map. An immediate cessation of settlement activities is requisite for salvaging the peace process and the possibility of actually, physically achieving the two-State solution of a viable, contiguous, independent Palestine living side by side with Israel in peace and security on the basis of the pre-1967 borders.

This letter is in follow-up to our previous 317 letters to you regarding the ongoing crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, since

28 September 2000. Those letters, dated from 29 September 2000 (A/55/432-S/2000/921) to 25 June 2008 (A/ES-10/421-S/2008/421), constitute a basic record of the crimes being committed by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people since September 2000. For all of these war crimes, State terrorism and systematic human rights violations committed against the Palestinian people, Israel, the occupying Power, must be held accountable and the perpetrators must be brought to justice.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of the present letter distributed as a document of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 5, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Riyad **Mansour**
Ambassador
Permanent Observer